

TAYMA VANEK JOHNSON

A watercolor illustration of a woman with long, dark hair, wearing a blue and white patterned top. She is shown in profile, looking down with her hands clasped together in a prayerful or contemplative gesture. The background is a soft, ethereal wash of light blue and white.

**called
to
serve?**

Women's Stories
OF THE DECISION

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For God, who lights the path,
and for *you*—
seeking His direction and
walking in faith.

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“It wasn’t until I got to the mission that I realized your decision to serve a mission isn’t a once-in-a-lifetime event.”

Into the Unknown

“Do you feel that?” I nodded. ‘I think that’s Heavenly Father telling you that you need to go.’”

Redemption

“I wondered if serving a mission would ever feel right again.”

I Will Go and Do

“I knew with unshaken faith that the Lord had asked me to serve a mission. And by that virtue, I knew that He would provide a way.”

An Eternal Mission

“Just for fun, they decided to attend mission prep together. But something was different this time. The class was well taught, and the atmosphere was wonderful, but for some reason, Kamryn had the feeling that she wasn’t supposed to be there.”

He Consecrates Our Decisions

“God cares much more about our willingness to follow Him in the decisions we make than He does about the decision itself.”

Trust in His Plan

“We both realized why things weren’t quite working out the way we wanted them to. There was something I wasn’t seeing that needed to be in my future, something that needed to be accomplished. There was work for me to do.”

Confusion Turns to Peace

“It wasn’t until then that I started to realize that I had previously put a lot of pressure on myself to go on a mission. But what if I didn’t have to go?”

From Reluctance to Resilience

“When it came time to do hard things, Heavenly Father would be supporting her every step of the way.”

My True Mission

“That day, I realized that God had given me a mission to bring others to Christ right where I was.”

In His Hands

“Looking back, I am very glad I chose to serve a mission. Was it the right choice? I’m not sure. I don’t think that there was a right choice.”

My Personal Sacred Grove Moments

“I knelt at the side of my bed in tears, hoping for some sense of relief. Yet once again, I felt nothing. My parents talked to me and suggested that I simply start my mission papers. My initial reaction was to tell them ‘Absolutely not.’”

Lord, I Will Go Serve Thee

“Why wasn’t God responding? Did He not care about me? Was heaven blocked? It was during these ponderings that I finally realized that I wasn’t serious. I was ‘asking,’ but I didn’t want to know the answer because I was afraid.”

My Next S Curve

“At the end of that first semester, I realized that my desire to serve a mission had been replaced by a desire to stay at school. I prayed about it a lot, and I had a very strong answer from Heavenly Father that He needed me to stay. I was on cloud nine! . . . The only problem was that God had really been saying, ‘Not yet.’”

Decision before Confirmation

“As our relationship took off, I wondered if a mission was going to fit into my life. I felt that if this relationship continued to develop, I needed to pursue it instead of pursuing a mission. I began to feel that if I didn’t get to serve at this stage of my life, Heavenly Father would offer me other opportunities.”

A Redirected Path

“At that moment, peace came over me. I felt Heavenly Father telling me, ‘No, Ashley. You need to serve a mission. You have a purpose here on earth.’”

If Ye Have Desires

“God wants us to be happy. He cares about what we want. I had this assumption that I needed to do everything to please Him, even if it wasn’t something I wanted.”

My Mission Is Still Teaching Me

“The day I read the last page of Preach My Gospel, I wasn’t wondering if I should go, but where I would go.”

We Will Still Serve

“When I set my sight on preparing for a mission and doing what was right, everything fell into place, just like it was supposed to.”

Is He There?

“The message I got was to ask and I would receive. I felt so angry. I was pounding on the door for someone to answer me, and it was silent. I was doing everything I was supposed to. Why did it work for everyone except me?”

[He Is in Control](#)

“If you have a desire to serve, then go for it. If you’re not sure, follow the righteous desires of your heart in either direction. The key is to keep moving. As you move, Heavenly Father guides the path.”

[A Gradual Illumination](#)

“It seemed that everyone around me was preparing to serve a mission—I was in the minority, not wanting to serve a mission. I had a testimony, and I had a desire for others to join the Church and make covenants with the Lord, but I didn’t have the desire to be a full-time missionary.”

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Choosing to Serve

“I decided to work and save up money until I turned nineteen. However, as the time got closer, I found myself stalling and procrastinating starting my mission papers. I came to the realization that I was afraid.”

GROWING UP A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH, I KNEW SERVING A MISSION WAS always an option for me when I got older. When I was quite young, probably in elementary school, I met Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles at a stake conference. I remember looking up at him when he shook my hand. He was so tall! Because there were so many children surrounding him who wanted to meet him, he had time to ask me only one question: “Are you going to serve a mission?” Elder Perry’s six-foot-four stature was a bit intimidating to me, not to mention that he was an Apostle of the Lord. The only acceptable answer was yes—or, in my case, “uh-huh.”

When I was a junior in high school, my brother left on his mission. He was my best friend, and I so badly wanted to be where he was, experiencing what he was experiencing. Sometime around then, President Russell M. Nelson held a Church-wide youth fireside during which he talked about the gathering of Israel. He said it was the *most* important thing that we could be doing on the earth. I felt the Spirit during that meeting, and I began to realize that if the prophet said the gathering was the most important thing that could be done, then that was what I should do. Of course, serving a mission is not the only way to gather Israel, but it seemed to me to be the most straightforward way. I determined that I would postpone attending college until I had served my mission.

My birthday is in December, so the summer after my senior year, I decided to work and save up money until I turned nineteen. However, as the

time got closer, I found myself stalling and procrastinating starting my mission papers. I came to the realization that I was afraid. I struggled with mental health difficulties, and the thought of leaving home for a year and a half without my parents for support was incredibly daunting.

While I was at work one day, I received an email from Brigham Young University–Idaho (BYU–I) saying that I wasn't too late to apply for school there. After receiving the email, I considered the possibility of going to school before serving a mission. Very quickly, I realized that was the path I should take. I attended BYU–I that fall and loved it so much.

While I did take a missionary prep class at BYU–I, I continued to feel fear about a potential mission and realized more and more that I didn't want to go. I took the class as a matter of principle, but my heart wasn't in it. I really didn't see myself going, and I still took no steps toward starting my mission papers.

I transferred to Brigham Young University (BYU) in the winter semester of 2019. That semester was probably the worst semester of college I ever had. I missed my friends in Idaho, I was caught in a vice of disordered eating, and I was drowning in depression, hopelessness, and self-loathing.

At one point, my bishop called me in to his office to have a “get to know you” interview. In the interview, he asked me if I planned on serving a mission. Not wanting to admit that I didn't want to go, I told him that I was thinking about it. While I don't remember his exact words, what he said next was something like, “It doesn't matter if you go or don't go. No one will judge you either way. However, if you are waiting on an answer from God, good luck getting it if you aren't going to do anything about it. God can't drive a parked car.”

That counsel certainly called me to repentance. I walked back to my apartment and knelt in prayer. I admitted to Heavenly Father that I knew I had already received an answer: going on a mission would be a very good thing, and I believed it was what He wanted me to do. I told Him that I didn't want to go. However, in an attempt to follow His will instead of mine, I told Him that if He could give me the desire to go, I would do my best.

Within forty-eight hours of saying that prayer, a desire developed in my heart. Not only did I feel strongly that the decision was right, but I was also excited about it! I told my parents and got started on my papers. Within two weeks, all of my preparatory appointments were finished, my interviews were

completed, and my papers were submitted. I felt so good about going and could not wait to receive my call.

I received my call about three weeks later: I was to serve in the Brazil São Paulo Mission starting on July 10, 2019. I was ecstatic! For some reason, Brazil had not even been on my radar as a potential place I might go, but I felt so honored by God's trust in me to go and serve there.

I wish I could say everything was smooth sailing from there, but it was not. Satan worked hard on me, even after I submitted my papers. I felt unworthy to go and had a lot of emotional conversations with my mom. Once I received my assignment, I had to decide whether to cancel a fully planned trip through five countries in Europe with my mom in order to get my visa for Brazil, because my passport would be necessary in either endeavor. Knowing that my mission was more important, I determined not to go to Europe. I also got an impression during a particularly rough night that I should not try to go on a mission without being prescribed some sort of medication for my mental health. I had always been against taking medications for my mental health, wanting so badly to handle it on my own and not rely on some kind of chemical to make me happy. Yet as I thought about it, it suddenly seemed like the right thing to do, and I followed through with that prompting.

Now, when I look back on the decision I made to serve a mission, I am so glad and proud that I made it. It was one of the hardest experiences of my life, but it shaped me and built me up in so many ways. I grew in spiritual and emotional maturity, I met countless children of God who impacted me, and I loved and learned something from every one of my companions. I can only imagine where I would be had I not gone.

I know that making the choice to serve a mission or not is hard. Men have been asked by the prophet to serve missions as they are able, but for women, there is no such commandment. While that decision is partially freeing for women, it also makes things more complicated. Receiving personal revelation is hard, saving the money is hard, planning out your future is hard, facing the possible judgment of people who do not understand your story and relationship with God is hard, and facing the unknown can be especially hard. I also know that God has an individual plan for everyone. Because of His love for us and how invested He is in our future, I strongly believe that He is willing to help us understand that plan as we put in the work.

The main pieces of advice I would give to one deciding whether she should serve a mission are these: First, take action. The answer of whether you should go is not going to fall out of the sky and hit you on the head. You have to be an agent. Second, be meek. Meekness involves humility and submissiveness. When you receive your answer, you must follow through, whether or not it was the answer you were expecting. God will support you and make the most of whichever decision you make. However, I would highly recommend making the choice that He guides you to if He has a specific answer—sometimes the answer is that it's up to you—because I can only imagine the blessings He has in store for you along the way.

—Jantzen

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